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Written Statement for the Record

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Submitted to the

Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support of the

House Committee on Ways and Means

on Responding to Long-Term Unemployment

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Chairman McDermott and Ranking Member Linder, on behalf of the 152,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), I want to thank you for providing us the opportunity to comment on the serious issue of long-term unemployment. APA supports preventing long-term unemployment through expanding the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and job training and reemployment programs. Long-term unemployment can be associated with several mental health issues, and an assessment of the mental health implications on workers should be seriously considered when evaluating potential responses to this issue.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. Comprised of researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and graduate students, APA works to advance psychology as a science, a profession, and a means of promoting health, education, and human welfare.

APA's Committee on Socioeconomic Status (CSES) was formed to identify and act as a catalyst in the APA's efforts to address issues of SES and promote appropriate attention to SES in psychological research and practice. CSES collects information and documentation concerning SES; promotes scientific understanding of the roles of poverty and SES in health, education, and human welfare; and develops approaches to the application of psychology that take into account the effects of SES on psychological development and well-being.

The current state of the economy continues to be an enormous source of stress for Americans, with 78% reporting money as a significant source of stress and 75% citing the economy as a stressor, as of April 2009. More than half of Americans reported job stability as a source of stress, indicating that the threat of unemployment alone is causing stress for a majority of Americans, and this number only continues to climb as the layoffs continue.¹

The psychological effects of long-term unemployment are numerous and far-reaching. Even at the most basic levels, long-term unemployed individuals show significant increases in salivary cortisol, a hormone released in response to stress, and report high levels of financial strain (Grossi, Perski, Lundberg, & Soares, 2001).² Cortisol is adaptive when released as a response to an immediate threat, but causes damage when individuals show sustainment of elevated levels of this hormone.³ This line of research indicates that there are physiological mechanisms at work that explain how stress can have damaging physical effects and be associated with the six leading causes of death in the United States.⁴

More immediately, economy-related stress is related to an increase in poor health behaviors, an effect that is even more damaging for women. Women are more likely to report that they have eaten too much consumed unhealthy foods, or skipped a meal as a result of stress.⁵ Women are

¹ Price, M. (2009). The recession is stressing men more than women. *Monitor on Psychology*, 40, 10.

² Grossi, G., Perski, A., Lundberg, U., & Soares, J. (2001). Associations between financial strain and the diurnal salivary cortisol secretion of long-term unemployed individuals. *Integrative Physiological and Behavioral Science*, 36, 205-219.

³ Sapolsky, R. M. (2010). *Why zebras don't get ulcers: A guide to stress, stress-related diseases, and coping* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Holt Paperbacks.

⁴ Miller, L. H., & Smith, A. D. (1994). *The Stress Solution*. New York City: Pocket Books.

⁵ American Psychological Association (2009). *Stress in America*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

also more likely to report physical symptoms of stress, including irritability, anger, fatigue, and lack of interest or motivation and energy.

Research also indicates that Hispanics are disproportionately impacted by stress, as they were more likely than Whites or Blacks to report an increase in stress levels from 2008 to 2009. In addition, Hispanics were most likely to report physical symptoms as a result of stress.⁶

A number of responses have been proposed to end long-term unemployment (which is defined as being out of work for more than 27 weeks) including expanding the TANF program and job training and reemployment programs. The TANF program provides assistance to low income individuals and families, and was designed to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage. TANF has the capacity to provide a valuable safety net; yet a drop in the percentage of eligible families receiving aid from 84% in 1995 to 40% in 2005 has weakened its ability to serve the most vulnerable families. APA supports reauthorizing and expanding the TANF program to provide temporary assistance to the long-term unemployed.

The Michigan Prevention Research Center (MPRC) at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan developed and evaluated the JOBS Program to help unemployed workers effectively seek reemployment and cope with the multiple challenges and stresses of unemployment and job-searching. The JOBS Program is a group-based intervention that has the dual goals of promoting reemployment and enhancing the coping capacities of unemployed workers and their families.

JOBS is delivered during five half-day sessions in employment offices, social service settings, community settings, and outplacement programs. Workshop leaders model and reinforce supportive behavior and effective job-search activities and skills and work to create a supportive learning environment through exercises that provide opportunities for participants to learn from and support each other. APA supports job training and reemployment programs that take into account the psychological and emotional needs of workers to help prevent long-term unemployment.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a statement on the negative psychological impact of long-term unemployment and the possible policy responses to this important issue. By preventing and finding solutions to long-term unemployment we can help improve mental and physical health, reduce disparities, and create a healthier and more productive society.

⁶ American Psychological Association (2009). *Stress in America*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.